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Film Review: Miriam Miente, Dirs. Natalia Cabral & Oriol Estrada

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Miriam miente. Dir. Natalia Cabral & Oriol Estrada. Dominican Republic, 2018. Dur: 90 min.

This Dominican/Spanish co-production is the directors' Cabral and Estrada first full-length feature film. Their previous work is in documentaries, such as the award-winning *You and Me* (2014) and *Site of Sites* (2017). Their feature film *Miriam miente* has traveled the international film festival circuit from the Chicago International Film Festival where the film was nominated for a Gold Hugo prize, to Gijón International Film Festival in Spain where the film won an ALMA Award. *Miriam miente* also won a Cima Award at the Huelva Latin American Film Festival. Additionally the film won an Award of Ecumenical Jury Special Mention at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in the Czech Republic. Most recently finishing out the year in December 2018 the film competed in the 40th annual Havana Film Festival in Cuba.

In 90 minutes, directors Cabral and Estrada along with the nuanced acting of emerging actor Dulce Rodríguez envelope the audience with an intimate look into the world of Miriam: a young 15-year old woman in the Dominican Republic with a white overbearing mother with whom she lives, and a black father divorced from her mother whom she visits. The film begins with a soft opening

with Miriam swimming with her best friend Jennifer (Carolina Rohana). As the two girls share their future hopes and dreams, Miriam carefully protects her hair from getting wet, as Jennifer plunges her dirty-blond hair in the water. In their pool conversations the two laugh, tease each other, and decide to celebrate their upcoming quinceañeras together.

Between comedic dance rehearsals that keep the audience laughing and awkward sequined dress fittings, Miriam's mother Tere consistently picks at her daughter in minuscule ways that have an underlying racial subtext. Despite her mom's micro-aggressions, the audience also witnesses Tere's complexity as she attempts to erase the traces of Miriam's father from her daughter's life from an unresolved divorce. Tere is both the source of aggression and protection for her daughter in a difficult mother-daughter relationship.

In preparations for the quinceañera, the topic of Internet romance looms as Miriam struggles to find a way to invite her Internet boyfriend Jean-Louis to be a member of her dancing court. Although only having met in an online chat room without exchanging pictures, Miriam realizes upon spying on him before their planned meeting that he is black. Instead of meeting with Jean-Louis, Miriam hides and ignores him. After ghosting him online, Miriam struggles to figure out how she could tell her mother that he is a young black man and not the child of the French ambassador that her mother has hoped he would be. Miriam defies Tere and decides to invite Jean-Louis to the quinceañera. In a painful moment in the film, the audience quickly sees that it is not only her mother who is racist but also possibly Jean-Louis himself as he chooses to ignore Miriam at her own party. The film concludes coming full circle as Miriam and Jennifer dressed in sequins find themselves once again alone quietly laughing together as others celebrate their quinceañeras inside.

The cinematography of the film adds to the gentle and intimate narrative. Throughout the movie, the camera uses a series of close-up shots to study Miriam's pondering face, as she considers and decides where she fits in the outlandish quinceañera preparations and larger than life celebration. The close ups also reveal Miriam's agency and thought process throughout the film, as she distances herself from the stress and excitement of the quinceañera planning-in a world of hair straightening, tulle, and decorations.

To further capture the delicate topics of the film, it is shot almost entirely using a soft assortment of colors with a hazy if not dreamlike quality. From the light turquoise of the opening scenes, to the pastel pink and blue of the quinceañera dresses in the final shot, the film begins and ends with a soft close up on Miriam with her best friend Jennifer. Through the delicate palette, the film is as much about revealing accepted forms of racism and societal traps as it is about true friendship between two young women.

Miriam miente offers a cinematic gaze into the intimate challenges, heartbreak and friendship as Miriam negotiates daily life. This film is a break out from previous representations of race and coming of age in the Dominican Republic and would be an exceptional addition to Latin American and Caribbean film collections. It is appropriate for a range of audiences from film or cultural studies specialists analyzing representations of race and gender, to undergraduate and/or high school students studying film, and Spanish language. In its accessibility and intimacy, it invites audiences into Miriam's Dominican world of race, Internet relationships, racism, micro-aggression, societal rules, and true friendship between young women.

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